King Shrine Solicitations To Start

Promoters of a memorial to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. yesterday announced the start of fund-raising efforts in Memphis and toured with city officials the Lorraine Motel where King was assassinated almost 10 years ago.

Charles Buford, who last year announced plans to purchase the motel and turn it into a national shrine, said the fund-raising effort would begin with a breakfast this morning.

Buford led officials of the city housing and community development division on a tour of a five-block area which he hopes to renovate and elicited a pledge to work with him.

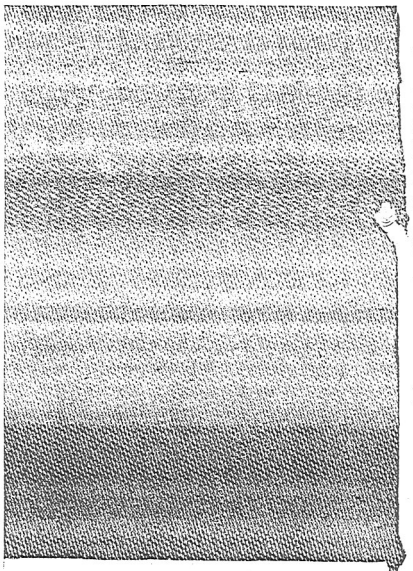
The fund-raising group, The Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. & Lorraine Bailey Fund, was granted a permit March 8 to solicit contributions in Memphis, and earlier applied for a $350,000 grant from community development.

The proposal calls for $2.5 million to acquire and renovate the Lorraine at 406 Mulberry, landscape a park and erect a statue. Subsequent phases call for a cultural and educational center, housing and a commercial center. The total cost for developing the area bounded by Main, Calhoun, Second and Huling would be $14.3 million.

The hotel would remain open for tourists and church retreats, which would raise money for maintenance.

Coby Smith, a member of Buford's Memphis advisory board, said the proposal is an attempt to build on the tragedy of King's death — 10 years ago April 4.

"This city must not allow this to wallow in a kind of shameful abyss," said Smith, head of the planning and development division at the State



Technical Institute at Memphis. "People identify with this thing. Everyone remembers 1968."

He said the proposal has, for blacks, "more power in the heart of it than voter registration did."

The memorial and proposed renovations mark the third development planned in the area by black groups. In late 1976 the Church of God in Christ announced plans for a $20-million downtown complex surrounding it's present building at Main and Linden. And a group of black professionals has plans for a 10-story office building at Linden and Third.

Lorraine Motel owner Walter Bailey, whose wife Loree died of a cerebral hemorrhage suffered shortly after King was shot, said he is willing to sell the motel.

Hershel Lipow, community development planning coordinator, said Buford's group applied for a community development action grant, which is available for landmarks, historic preservation, economic development and housing. He said about $5 million is available for such grants, but the exact amount and choice of projects will be up to the City Council this summer.

He said the project "has some great merit," but community development is not necessarily the source for the funds. Whether it is eligible for community development money "depends on exactly what it is our part does. It's a gray area. We're going to check it out."

Buford said the group has fund raising chapters in six other cities and an international chapter in Norway, but has collected only $6,000 to $7,000 so far because the work is just beginning. Fund-raising efforts will begin officially April 4, he said.

Buford, 35, said he was formerly executive director of a recreation program for handicapped persons in Chicago. "I came through Memphis and I saw something had to be done."